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FBI 'knows US scientist who made anthrax'

By Andrew Buncombe in Washington

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The FBI has identified the man behind last year's series of fatal anthrax mailings but is "dragging its feet" over bringing charges because the suspect is a former government scientist, it was claimed yesterday.

Barbara Rosenberg, of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), said many scientists working in the field were aware of the suspect, who she said had been questioned at least twice by the authorities. She said the FBI was reluctant to arrest him because he knew government secrets.

She said the FBI had known of the suspect since October and added: "There are a number of insiders – government insiders – who know people in the anthrax field who have a common suspect. The FBI has questioned that person more than once. So it looks as though the FBI is taking that person very seriously." The FBI said the investigation had not been narrowed to one suspect.

Five people died and 13 others were infected with anthrax after letters laced with the bacteria were sent to Tom Daschle, the Senate majority leader, another prominent politician and the media last autumn. Hoax letters were also sent. Among those who died were Bob Stevens, 63, a British-born picture editor

It has long been believed that the anthrax came from a US government laboratory. But Dr Rosenberg's comments – made at Princeton University and reported by the *Trenton Times* newspaper – are the most specific yet. The accusations, many of which are repeated on the FAS website, says the man may have worked at the US military laboratory near Washington that tested the letters, Fort Detrick, Maryland. Most of the genuine and many of the hoax letters were posted from near Trenton, New Jersey.

Dr Rosenberg, director of the FAS chemical and biological arms control programme, said: "We can draw a likely portrait of the perpetrator as a former Fort Detrick scientist who is now working for a contractor in the Washington DC area.

"He had reason for travel to Florida, New Jersey and the United Kingdom. There is also the likelihood the perpetrator made the

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anthrax himself. He grew it ... and weaponised it at a private location where he had accumulated the equipment and the material.

"We know that the FBI is looking at this person and it's likely that he participated in the past in secret activities that the government would not like to see disclosed. And this raises the question of whether the FBI may be dragging its feet somewhat and may not be so anxious to bring to public light the person who did this.

"I know that there are insiders, working for the government, who know this person and who are worried that it could happen that some kind of quiet deal is made that he just disappears from view."

In an analysis of the anthrax mailings posted on the FAS website, Dr Rosenberg speculates that the suspect must be "angry at some bio- defence agency or component, and he is driven to demonstrate, in a spectacular way, his capabilities and the government's inability to respond.

"He is cocksure that he can get away with it. Does he know something that he believes to be sufficiently damaging to the United States to make him untouchable by the FBI?

An FBI spokeswoman said yesterday that the bureau's investigation was still continuing. "We have not narrowed it down to one person," she said. "We have spoken to a lot of people."

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